

## Amherst Historical Society and Museum CPA Request, FY 17

### Mission Statement (adopted October 2012)

The mission of the Amherst Historical Society is to connect people to the town of Amherst, its history, and its culture.

### Vision Statement (adopted October 2012)

We believe in the power of history to ignite imagination, stimulate thought, and provide enjoyment.

The goals of the Amherst Historical Society are to collect, preserve, and display an extensive variety of objects that give residents and visitors an appreciation of the many aspects of life in Amherst. Central to these goals is the presentation of exhibits, lectures, and public events, as well as educational programs that engage people of all ages with the challenge of interpreting artifacts and records from the past. The society governs the Amherst History Museum, which is located in the 1750-era Simeon Strong House, 67 Amity Street, in the center of town.

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The Amherst Historical Society and Museum is grateful for the support from the Historical Commission for our past requests and hopes that the following, which continue this work, will also earn your endorsement.

Last year, we received funds for two essential projects: repainting the structure in historically appropriate colors and materials, and a ground-penetrating radar survey of our historic landscape. Phase 1 of the latter (the actual survey) was completed last month, as described in a recent newspaper story (<http://www.gazettenet.com/news/localphotography/19655635-95/ground-penetrating-radar-used-to-prepare-for-archaeological-dig-at-amherst-historical-museum>). Phase 2 will take place in the spring, when the weather is milder: having fully interpreted the data, experts from UMass Archaeological Services will conduct a series of representative physical excavations, a project in which we plan to involve the Amherst Public Schools. We have decided to undertake the reschedule the painting for the summer, for reasons outlined below.

We come to you this year with three projects, ranked in order of urgency:

1. Continuation of Feasibility Study: legal services to determine clear title and seek relief from testamentary restrictions: \$18,000
2. Carpentry and related essential repairs to envelope of building: \$ 20,000
3. Dendrochronological investigation of building to determine age and construction history: \$ 4500

Total: \$ 42,500

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1) For FY12, Town Meeting granted us \$ 35,000 for a Structural and Feasibility Study to determine:

The structural integrity of the Strong house, as well as its ability to withstand the impacts of any improvements-a rear addition, foundation work, etc.

The size, configuration and cost of a climate-controlled storage facility for the collection.

Construction cost estimates, including the ability of the Historical Society to fundraise.

As we have explained in previous documents, a variety of factors prompted us to delay some of that work until recently, as we reviewed our plans and adapted to changing circumstances, among them the evolving plans of the Jones Library for a building expansion.

We have now expended most of that money and find that further funding will be required to complete the process. As Commission members will know, the Museum and the Library have long viewed one another not just as neighbors, but also as potential partners. Between us, we hold the material and textual heritage of the Town's history in our custody. Indeed, talks about possible collaboration underlay the original desire to undertake a feasibility study. It stood to reason that the two organizations might benefit from shared storage, exhibit, and program space. No matter what form that new construction takes, legal relief will be required before we can go forward.

The obstacle that stands in our way is the testamentary bequest that transferred the house from Mrs. Emerson and her three daughters to the Museum in 1916. According to the terms of the will, the form of the house must be maintained as it is (i.e. no additions, no removals of sections or elements, no additional structures anywhere on the property) or the property reverts to the Massachusetts Historical Commission. It was a natural way to think of preservation a century ago, but (1) we operate differently now, and (2) this clause actually makes it impossible for us to fulfill our mission (above) or, indeed, to carry out the original vision of Mrs. Emerson under modern conditions.

The solution is therefore to petition the courts for relief from these conditions.

Our task here is twofold:

1) To clear title to the property (there is an anomaly in the documentation left by one of the sisters, whose will does not appear on record).

2) Having secured clear title, to get the state to free us from the terms of the will.

We have been holding consultations with the Attorney General's Office (Division of Charities) as well as lawyers, and we are assured that these sorts of actions, resting on an ample basis of precedent, are fairly common and face no real obstacles. The process does, however, cost money.

For the former task, we have retained the services of Ziomek and Ziomek of Amherst, who estimate costs at \$ 5000.

For the latter task, we have retained the services of Elizabeth S. Reinhardt of Concord, who has extensive experience in this specialized field and estimates the remaining charges at approximately \$ 13,000.

2) As noted, we have been planning to repaint the house. However, in preparing for this work, we identified many areas of the building that show signs of decay, which should be professionally repaired before repainting.

Donald Teagno of Teagno Associates construction, which is qualified to do conservation and restoration work on historic structures, has undertaken a preliminary survey of carpentry and related needs. His provisional estimate for this work is \$ 20,000. (We will seek further details.)

3) One of the most important tasks of stewardship of a historic house is determining the age, materials, and construction sequence of the building, correlated with changes in ownership and use. To this end, the Museum commissioned a historic structure report, carried out by an interdisciplinary team of experts, in 2002. It remains a vital resource, but the evidence gleaned from physical examination (vs. study of the documentary record) can now be supplemented by even more modern techniques not available at the time. One of the most promising is dendrochronology, which, by taking core samples from representative timbers and comparing the results with established examples of the same woods from the same region, is able to attain an accurate date.

William Flynt of Historic Deerfield (<http://www.historic-deerfield.org/discover-deerfield/summer-fellowship-program/sfp-faculty/>) is the acknowledged pioneer and expert in this field. He has done a site visit to the house and is eager to undertake this work.

Estimate: 26 samples @ \$1000 from three construction phases: \$ 2600 (\$3000 with contingency)  
Further: \$1000 for related disassembly, reassembly, carpentry; \$500 for equipment and access.  
Total: \$4500.

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All of the above projects are essential to the performance of our mission and feasible. The carpentry and dendrochronology work can be conducted together as soon as funds are released next summer. We would hope to complete the legal work in the course of the summer, as well, though, depending on the schedules of the courts, it might last slightly longer, but not beyond the end of the calendar year. For all these purposes, we have access to no other funding.

The figures cited here represent our best estimates of costs based on consultation with the relevant experts. (Naturally, we will revise them between now and the final CPAC hearing in February, should the numbers change.)

We thank you for considering this summary of our requests. Should they meet with your approval, we will be prepared to submit a more expansive version to CPAC at the end of the week when formal proposals are due.

Respectfully submitted,

James Wald  
President, Amherst Historical Society